

Book Review: Teaching Politics Beyond the Book: Film, Texts and New Media in the Classroom

by Blog Admin

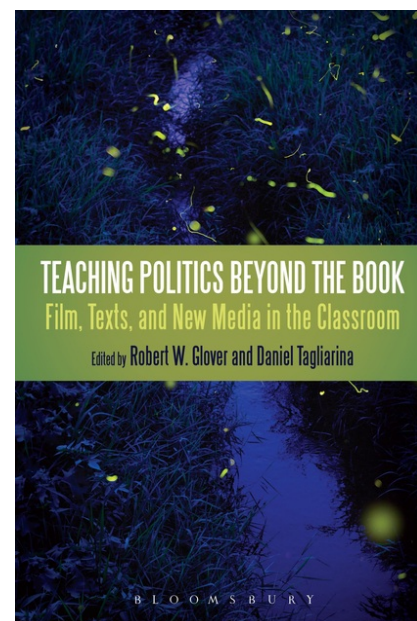
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*To teach political issues such as political struggle, justice, and interstate conflict, educators rely mostly on textbooks and lectures. However, many other forms of narrative exist that can elevate our understanding of such issues. This book seeks new ways to foster learning beyond the textbook and lecture model, by using creative and new media, including graphic novels, animated films, hip-hop music, Twitter, and more. Reviewed by **Caroline Varin**.*

Teaching Politics Beyond the Book: Film, Texts and New Media in the Classroom. Robert W. Glover and Daniel Tagliarina (eds.). Bloomsbury Academic. January 2013.

Find this book:

In a [TED Talk in 2010](#), Professor Ken Robinson stated that “nobody has a clue (...) what the world will look like in five years’ time”, and that creativity is just as important as literacy in education. *Teaching Politics Beyond the Book: Film, Texts and New Media in the Classroom* is on the same wavelength, emphasizing creativity as a teaching tool to keep up with the learning abilities of students in “the heavily mediated and information-driven age” (p. xiv) and prepare them for the future. In this edited volume, teachers from the American system of education share their experiences with non-traditional teaching techniques, from using theatre and visual art to social media and movies. Although this volume focuses on political science, educators from all academic backgrounds should think ‘beyond the book’ and help prepare the next generation for a world we can only imagine today.





Technology in the last five years has transformed the flow of information, giving students new opportunities that did not exist when the professors of today were at school. Social media now enables students to build bridges across countries, cultures, and disciplines. Focusing on ‘the book’ as the primary method of learning to become antiquated, the book posits that academics can adapt to continue to make education relevant to students.

Part Five of this volume discusses the use of the internet and social media as a way to build ‘online social capital’ and foster skills that are necessary to the study of political science in the twenty-first century. The Middle East uprisings in 2011 emerged from social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to spread across the world, changing and unsettling the political environment. The authors argue that students of political science need to understand the impact of technology for mobilising civil society and should be encouraged to use social media in class to prepare them for jobs beyond academia; with companies increasingly using Twitter and the like in day to day research, marketing, and information dissemination, familiarity with social media is a skill that can and should be encouraged in the classroom.

Ari Kohen and Chapman Rackaway argue that active learning is more effective than 'stand and deliver' techniques. In the chapters describing how to use social media in the classroom, both professors demonstrate the methods they used to encourage students to engage in live debates with each other on Twitter, and to develop and share their understanding of the topic by publishing blog posts that could have a reach beyond the classroom. Both professors agreed that bringing social media into the classroom has its limitations. In particular, the experimental use of social media as a teaching tool, and the necessity for educators to build familiarity with these techniques slows down the learning process for the students. Nonetheless, by sharing their experiences, the authors enable other professors to learn from their mistakes and avoid some of the potholes of using social media to teach political science.

While the future might appear virtual, it can also be isolating. Sharing perspectives through social media does not necessarily encourage empathy or creativity. Music and theatre, on the other hand, have been used since the Ancient Greeks to teach politics to the plebeians by conveying emotions and sharing experiences. In Part Three, the authors describe how music and theatre can be used in the classroom to involve students in political education.

Simulations, in particular, can help students engage with new situations in a way that fosters imagination and creativity. This can be particularly useful when studying countries and cultures that are far removed from the classroom. Students are encouraged to go beyond the familiar and independently engage with sources that will enable them to understand and adapt to a new framework. Furthermore, simulations are interactive, and nurture important social skills that can easily disappear from a traditional classroom. Creativity, independent research and social engagement are vital skills that will be useful to students beyond their academic careers, while facilitating their engagement with political science.

The authors in Part Three also acknowledge the difficulties of bringing new methodologies into the classroom. Similar to social media, incorporating music and theatre into the teaching of politics is time consuming for professors, and can be discouraging, particularly at the beginning during the trial period.

Teaching Politics Beyond the Book: Film, Texts and New Media in the Classroom is an important volume for educators: it guides teachers to think outside the box and encourages them to experiment with new academic techniques. By sharing their experiences with readers, the contributing authors show that innovation in education is not only possible, it is necessary. The honest accounts by each author highlight the difficulties and successes of teaching politics *without* the book.

This volume comes with a [companion website](#) which could become a collection of shared teaching experiences, thereby enabling professors to learn from one another and to encourage innovation through a social platform. The aim of this volume is to enable teachers to stimulate their students in the classroom by helping them experience politics in a variety of ways, fostering life skills such as media and social skills, and encouraging empathy and creativity that will help them tackle the problems of tomorrow.

Caroline Varin obtained her PhD in International Relations from the London School of Economics and is currently working as an intelligence analyst for sub-Saharan Africa. Her areas of interest include security, terrorism studies, military affairs and intelligence gathering. [Read more reviews by Caroline.](#)